

The City Skunk

The skunk population is increasing in the city due to the many food and shelter sources that are available. Skunks are burrowing animals found in all parts of Ohio. Skunks are omnivorous; they feed on grubs, insects, small rodents, carrion, fruits and vegetables. In Canal Winchester, skunks breed from February to March; gestation is eight weeks – they produce four to seven young which are usually independent by mid-summer. Skunks are active all year but may be dormant during periods of extended cold. They are attracted to spaces under porches, sheds, woodpiles, rocks or debris, garbage, pet food and open composts.

The City of Canal Winchester does not remove any wild animal from a private property. It is the responsibility of each homeowner to keep an environment where wild animals do not want to stay. If an animal appears to be sick, use the contact information listed below.

Problems and best solutions

Lawn and garden

Skunks are usually attracted to lawns and gardens, especially after a rainfall when grubs and larvae are near the surface. Skunks dig small round holes, and in some cases, roll up large chunks of sod. The grubs feed on the grass root system, destroying the grass.

Garbage/composters

Garbage, compost and pet food can provide a real feast for skunks. Once skunks find a food source, they will continue to return. Since skunks are poor climbers, close down this wildlife café by:

- Storing garbage inside the garage or basement until the morning of pick up
- Use a repellent like oil of mustard or mothballs in the bottom of the garbage can.
- Fit garbage cans with tight lids and secure the cans so that they cannot be tipped over.
- Using enclosed-style composters
- Feed pets indoors

Evicting skunks from homes, sheds, porches

Skunks are burrowing animals, so spaces under porches, sheds, woodpiles, rocks or debris are an open invitation for skunks to set up house. Preventing these animals from moving in should be your priority. The following suggestions will assist you in removing skunks and will discourage them from re-entering.

Note: Eviction should only be done when babies can move on their own.

Step 1

Check areas around your property for the den entrance. If you think you have found the entrance, cover the hole with dirt or balled up newspaper. If the hole is in use, the skunk will burrow through the dirt or paper. If the dirt or paper is undisturbed for three to five days, the hole can be closed permanently.

Step 2

Encourage skunks to leave on their own by making the home uninhabitable. Try:

- Sprinkling Naphtha Flakes around the area (babies must be mobile)
- Distribute urine-soaked kitty litter in and around the den.
- Keeping the area brightly lit.
- Playing a radio at the entrance using an all-talk radio station.
- Repeatedly blocking the entrance with dirt or newspaper to create an obstacle to entry.
- Installing a one-way door, allowing the skunk to leave, but not re-enter. (This method should not be used between April and September when skunks are rearing their young, unless the babies are mobile.)

Step 3

Before permanently blocking any entrance:

- Check to see if skunks have moved out, especially between April and September when babies may be present. (see Step 1)
- Be sure that no animal is trapped inside the den, as it will starve to death. Not only will the animal suffer but you will be left with a decomposing carcass.

Step 4

When you are sure that all skunks have left:

- Secure the hole to prevent re-entry. Make sure all boards or galvanized heavy wire screening is extended at least 7 to 10 inches straight down and 7 to 10 inches angled 90 degrees outwards underground. Skunks are excellent diggers and continuing the barrier at a 90 degree angle makes it more difficult to dig under. Backfill the area with dirt. Repair siding and holes in buildings. Place wood or wire screening around base of porches and buildings as a prevention skirt. Make sure you cover these areas to at least 7 to 10 inches straight down and 7 to 10 inches angled 90 degrees outwards.
- Eliminate piles of rocks or debris and stack woodpiles neatly to eliminate holes.

Window wells/tree wells

Skunks can become trapped in window wells. Since they are poor climbers, you can help them out by placing a rough board or board with cleats in the well. Try to keep the angle at less than 45 degrees so that it is not too steep.

To put the board in the well, approach slowly and keep low out of sight. Retreat if the skunk stamps its front feet or raises its tail and approach again later. Keep all pets and people away and the skunk will leave on its own; usually after dark. Either leave the ramp in place permanently or place a tight cover over the wells to prevent this from happening again.

After they spray

A skunk can spray up to 10 feet with great accuracy from the two ducts located under its tail. Skunks are placid creatures and will only spray when they feel threatened. It provides advance warning by stamping its front feet, raising its tail and turning its rear end toward the threat.

To remove skunk spray from ...

Eyes	Flush with large quantities of clean water. The painful irritation that occurs when the spray gets into the eyes will soon pass. Consult your doctor as soon as possible.
Pets	Consult your veterinarian as soon as possible.
Non-living objects	Use diluted chlorine bleach, ammonia or vinegar. Do a test spot to make sure these do not damage the material.
Skin	Wash with carbolic soap.

Rabies

Although all warm-blooded mammals can carry the rabies virus, skunks are a major vector of the virus in Canal Winchester. To avoid human exposure to rabies:

- All owned dogs and cats living in the City of Canal Winchester are required by law to be vaccinated against rabies. Consult your veterinarian for more information. Stay away from all wild animals especially if they appear tame, injured or sick. Skunks exhibiting abnormal behavior should be reported to the Franklin County Animal Control at 614-462-3400.

- If bitten by any animal, wash the wound with soap and water, contact a doctor, and report the bite to Franklin County Public Health at 614-525-3965. If possible, have someone keep the animal in sight so that it can be captured or confined.